

Bemba Language & Cultural Immersion Course

Advanced Level (B2 → C1)

Language Review Note

A language check was requested on this document. **The document is correctly written in English** — it is an advanced Bemba language teaching course aimed at English-speaking learners. The Bemba words, phrases, proverbs, and example sentences throughout the text are intentional instructional content, not errors. The document is **not written in Nyanja**; Bemba and Nyanja are distinct Bantu languages, and all Bemba-language examples in this course are correctly labelled as such. No language corrections were required.

Level: Advanced (B2 → C1) **Prerequisite:** Volume I or equivalent A2 knowledge

Language of instruction: English **Modules:** 10 Advanced Modules + Appendices

Special feature: Integrated cultural notes, proverbs & oral tradition

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Module 1 — Advanced Tonal System & Phonology

1.1 The Two-Tone System: High and Low

Bemba operates on a binary tonal system: every syllable carries either a High (H) tone or a Low (L) tone. While beginners can communicate without mastering tones, advanced speakers must control them to avoid ambiguity, convey grammatical distinctions, and sound natural.

Minimal tonal pairs (same consonants and vowels, different meaning):

Form A (High)	Meaning A	Form B (Low)	Meaning B
ukufúnda (H on fu)	to learn / to read	ukufùnda (L on fu)	to bury
ukusábila (H on sa)	to sharpen	ukusàbila (L on sa)	to go around
ukupépa (H on pe)	to waft / blow gently	ukupèpa (L on pe)	to pray / worship
icíbale (H on ci)	stone / rock	icibale (L on ci)	a village meeting place

1.2 Tonal Spreading & Downstep

A key feature of Bemba phonology is High-tone spreading: a High tone on one syllable often spreads to the following syllable. Additionally, Bemba exhibits downstep — a phenomenon where a High tone is realised slightly lower than the preceding High, creating stepped pitch levels within an utterance.

Advanced Tip: Practice tones by listening to native Bemba radio broadcasts (ZNBC Radio 2) and imitating short phrases. Tonal accuracy improves fastest through auditory training.

1.3 Nasalisation & Prenasalised Consonants

Bemba has a full set of prenasalised consonants: mb, mp, nd, nt, ng, nk, nsh. These function as single phonemes, not two-consonant sequences. The nasal is never syllabic when prenasalising a consonant.

Cluster	Example	Phonetic Description
mb-	mbwa (dog)	voiced bilabial, prenasalised
mp-	mpelwa (gift)	voiceless bilabial, prenasalised
nd-	ndimi (tongues)	voiced alveolar, prenasalised
ng-	nganda (house)	voiced velar, prenasalised
nk-	nkani (story)	voiceless velar, prenasalised
nsh-	nshiku (days)	prenasalised palato-alveolar

Exercise 1A – Tones & Phonology

1. What are the two tones in Bemba called, and how are they commonly marked in writing?
2. Give two Bemba words where a tone difference changes the meaning completely.
3. Are prenasalised consonants (mb, nd, ng) one phoneme or two in Bemba? Explain.
4. What is 'tonal spreading' and in which direction does it typically operate?
5. Identify the prenasalised consonant in: 'nkani', 'mbwa', 'nshiku'.

Answer Key

1. High (H) and Low (L). High is often marked with an acute accent (´), low is unmarked or marked with a grave (`).

2. ukufúnda (to learn) vs ukufùnda (to bury); ukupépa (to waft) vs ukupèpa (to pray).
3. One phoneme — they must be pronounced as a single unit, not as a nasal + consonant sequence.
4. A High tone 'spreads' rightward to the immediately following syllable, making it also High.
5. nkani → nk- | mbwa → mb- | nshiku → nsh-

Module 2 — Complex Verb Extensions & Derivation

2.1 What Are Verb Extensions?

One of the most powerful and productive features of Bemba (and Bantu languages generally) is the system of verb extensions — suffixes inserted between the verb root and the final vowel that systematically modify the verb's meaning. Mastering extensions allows you to generate hundreds of new verbs from a single root.

2.2 The Core Extensions

Extension	Function	Example (root: -fund-)	Meaning
-il- / -el-	Applied (Benefactive)	-fund-il-a	to learn for/at someone's benefit
-ish- / -esh-	Causative	-fund-ish-a	to teach (cause to learn)
-ik- / -ek-	Stative / Neuter	-fund-ik-a	to be learnable
-an-	Reciprocal	-fund-an-a	to learn from each other
-ul- / -ol-	Reversive	-shik-ul-a	to open (reverse of closing)
-uk- / -ok-	Separative / Away	-tumb-uk-a	to jump out / away
-iw- / -ew-	Passive	-fund-iw-a	to be taught
-ish-an-	Causative + Reciprocal	-fund-ish-an-a	to teach each other

2.3 Stacked Extensions

Multiple extensions can be stacked on a single root to create nuanced meanings. The order of stacking matters and follows strict phonological and semantic rules.

Extended Verb Form	Breakdown + Meaning
-fund-ish-il-a	causative + applied
-fund-iw-il-a	passive + applied
-land-il-an-a	applied + reciprocal
-shik-ul-ish-a	reversive + causative

2.4 Verbal Nouns & Infinitives

Every Bemba verb root can be nominalised using the uk(u)- prefix (Class 15 infinitive). This verbal noun can then take further derivational affixes.

Derived Form	Meaning
ukufunda	learning / to learn (infinitive)
ukufundisha	teaching (causative infinitive)
ukufundana	mutual learning
umufundishi	teacher (agent noun from -fundish-)
icifundisho	lesson / teaching material
ubufundisho	education (abstract/collective)

Cultural Note: Education & the Bemba Worldview

In traditional Bemba society, learning (ukufunda) was not confined to formal settings. Knowledge was transmitted through participation in communal life — farming, hunting, storytelling around the fire, and initiation ceremonies. The

concept of 'umuntu' (a person) is inherently relational: one becomes fully human through community. This is captured in the Bemba expression 'Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' — a person is a person through other people (cf. Ubuntu philosophy). Language learning itself was always a social, embedded practice.

Exercise 2A – Verb Extensions

1. Derive a causative form from the root -lya- (to eat). What does it mean?
2. What extension creates a passive meaning in Bemba? Give an example.
3. Form the reciprocal of -ona- (to see). Translate it.
4. What is the agent noun derived from -fundish- (to teach)?
5. Build a stacked form using -land- (to speak) with applied + passive. Translate.

Answer Key

1. -lyesha / -lyisha = to feed (cause to eat).
2. -iw- / -ew- | Example: fundiwila = to be taught.
3. -onan-a = to see each other / to meet.
4. umufundishi = teacher.
5. -land-il-iw-a = to be spoken to (on someone's behalf).

Module 3 — Relative Clauses & Subordinate Structures

3.1 Relativisation in Bemba

Bemba forms relative clauses through a relative marker that agrees with the noun class of the antecedent (the noun being modified). The relative marker appears on the verb and replaces (or precedes) the subject prefix.

3.2 Subject Relative Clauses

Structure: NOUN + [Relative Prefix + Verb Root + -a]

Bemba	English	Note
umuntu alanda	the person who speaks	Class 1 rel. prefix: a-
icibuku cifundwa	the book that is read	Class 5 rel. prefix: ci-
abantu balandila	the people who are talking	Class 2 rel. prefix: ba-
ifyabuku fifundwa	the books that are read	Class 6 rel. prefix: fi-

3.3 Object Relative Clauses

When relativising the object, the relative marker is inserted after the subject prefix and before the verb root, and the object position is left empty (a gap).

Bemba	English	Relative Marker
icibuku ico ndifunda	the book that I read	ico = Class 5 obj. rel. marker
umuntu uyo ndamwona	the person whom I saw	uyo = Class 1 obj. rel. marker
amenshi ayo ndanwa	the water that I drank	ayo = Class 6 rel. marker

3.4 Conditional & Temporal Clauses

Bemba Structure	English Equivalent	Function
Nga ufwaya...	If you want...	conditional
Ilyo nataliila...	When I arrived...	temporal (past)
Ngesha ukafika...	When you arrive (fut.)...	temporal (future)
Nokuba...	Even though... / Although...	concessive
Pakuti...	In order that... / So that...	purpose
Kanshi...	Therefore... / So then...	consequential

Exercise 3A – Relative Clauses

1. Translate: 'the teacher who teaches us' (umufundishi, -fundish-, Class 1)
2. Form an object relative clause: 'the food that we ate' (icibi, Class 5, -lya-)
3. What is the difference between a subject and object relative clause in Bemba?
4. Translate: 'Nga ndifwaya, nkaya.'
5. Use a temporal clause: 'When the sun rises, we will go.' (ilyo + -wela icuba)

Answer Key

1. umufundishi atufundisha.

2. icibi ico twalya.

3. In a subject relative clause, the relative marker is on the verb as the subject concord. In an object clause, it appears as an infix after the subject prefix and the object position is a gap.

4. 'If I want, I will go.'

5. Ilyo icuba cilawela, tukaya.

Module 4 — Idiomatic Expressions & Figurative Language

4.1 Why Idioms Matter

Idiomatic fluency is the mark of a true advanced speaker. Bemba is rich in idiomatic expressions rooted in agricultural life, communal relationships, animal imagery, and the physical landscape of northern Zambia. Using idioms appropriately signals cultural belonging and deep linguistic competence.

4.2 Core Idiomatic Expressions

Idiom	Literal	Actual Meaning
Ukupela amano	to finish wisdom	To be at a loss / to give up thinking
Ukutila amatwi	to block the ears	To ignore / to refuse to listen
Ukufumya umucinshi	to bring out respect	To honour someone publicly
Ukulya umulandu	to eat a case/problem	To take on responsibility / deal with trouble
Ukuumba umutima	to mould the heart	To have patience / endure calmly
Ukwata amano ku nganda	to keep wisdom at home	To be wise in practical matters
Ukufumya amafi ku calo	to dig up soil	To stir up old problems
Umucinshi wa kupela	a respect that finishes	Profound, total respect
Akanwa ka mwine	the owner's own mouth	Personal testimony / first-hand account
Ukutula amafi	to lift up problems	To solve deep-rooted issues

4.3 Figurative Speech in Everyday Conversation

Bemba Expression	Literal	Figurative Meaning
Uyu muntu ni mbeba.	This person is a rat.	Someone untrustworthy / a thief
Ali na moyo wa nkalamu.	He has the heart of a lion.	He is very brave
Amano yakwe ni mayo.	His wisdom is like water.	He is very wise and free-flowing
Nkani yake ni cibumba.	His story is clay.	His story keeps changing shape
Mano yakwe yapwa nga moshi.	His wisdom faded like smoke.	He lost his senses / became confused

Cultural Note: Animal Imagery in Bemba Speech

Animals hold a prominent place in Bemba figurative language. The lion (nkalamu) represents courage and royalty; the crocodile (ng'ona) represents hidden danger and deception; the rat (mbeba) symbolises betrayal and petty theft; the elephant (nsofu) embodies memory, power, and the elders' authority. These associations are deeply embedded in oral tradition and proverb culture.

Exercise 4A – Idioms & Figurative Language

1. What does 'ukutila amatwi' mean literally and idiomatically?
2. A friend says 'Umucinshi wa kupela'. What are they expressing?
3. Construct a sentence using 'ukuumba umutima' in context.
4. If someone is called 'ng'ona' in conversation, what character trait is implied?
5. Translate and interpret: 'Amano yakwe ni mayo.'

Answer Key

1. Literal: to block the ears. Idiomatic: to ignore someone / refuse to listen.
2. They are expressing profound, total respect for someone.
3. Example: 'Alefwaya ukuumba umutima pa nshila iikalamba.' (He needs to be patient on the long road.)
4. Deceptiveness / hidden danger — like a crocodile lurking beneath the surface.
5. Literal: His wisdom is like water. Meaning: He is extremely wise, adaptable, and naturally insightful.

Module 5 — Bemba Oral Tradition: Proverbs (Imfumo)

5.1 The Role of Proverbs in Bemba Culture

Proverbs (imfumo, singular: umufumo) are the backbone of Bemba oral tradition. They are used by elders to counsel, by parents to discipline, by leaders to persuade, and by poets to beautify speech. Knowing and deploying proverbs appropriately is a sign of intellectual and cultural maturity. An elder who speaks without proverbs is considered unrefined; a young person who uses them aptly earns great respect.

5.2 Classic Bemba Proverbs with Analysis

"Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu."

A person is a person through other people.

This is perhaps the most famous Bantu proverb, expressing the philosophy of Ubuntu. In Bemba society, personhood is not individual but relational — you exist fully only in community. Used to remind people of their social obligations and to discourage selfish behaviour.

"Akanwa ako takali ku mpanga."

The mouth is not in the forest (bush).

Speech is a public act with public consequences. What you say will be heard. Used to warn against speaking carelessly, gossiping, or making promises you cannot keep.

"Umwine wa nkoko tekwata ifyuni."

The owner of a chicken does not catch wild birds.

Be content with what you have. Cautions against greed and neglecting existing responsibilities.

"Icilungu ca mwela tabwela."

The wind's shelter does not return (come back).

Opportunities and moments pass and cannot be recovered. Used to encourage decisiveness and warn against procrastination.

"Uluse wakulota te wakulya."

What you dreamed about yesterday is not what you eat today.

Past glories or past suffering do not define the present. Used to encourage resilience and present-mindedness.

"Ifyabupuba fya mwana tabwelela."

The foolishness of youth does not return.

Childhood and youth are temporary — enjoy them, but also grow beyond them. Used both nostalgically and to push young people toward maturity.

5.3 Using Proverbs in Speech

Bemba Formula	English Equivalent
Bali ti...	They (the elders) say...
Efyo bali ti...	That is why they say...
Ico bacibila...	As it is said...
Ifyo abakalamba bali ti...	As the elders have said...

Exercise 5A – Proverbs

1. Explain the cultural significance of 'Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu' in your own words.
2. Which proverb would you use to advise someone who is wasting opportunities?
3. What does 'Akanwa ako takali ku mpanga' warn against?
4. Translate and explain: 'Ifyabupuba fya mwana tabwelela.'
5. Write a short paragraph (4–5 sentences in Bemba) incorporating at least one proverb using an introductory formula.

Answer Key

1. It expresses that human identity is communal, not individual — you become fully human through relationships and community.
2. 'Icilungu ca mwela tabwela' — the wind's shelter does not return; act now.
3. It warns against careless speech and gossip — your words are public and have consequences.
4. Literal: The foolishness of youth does not return. Meaning: Youth is temporary; grow up and mature, but also don't regret enjoying youth.
5. Open-ended — check for correct use of an introductory formula (bali ti...) and a relevant proverb.

Module 6 — Bemba Society & Social Structure

6.1 The Bemba People – Historical Overview

The Bemba (BaBemba) are a Bantu people who migrated to present-day northern Zambia from the Luba-Lunda kingdoms of the Congo basin, possibly in the 17th century. Under powerful chiefs (Bachieftainships), the Bemba built a highly organised centralised kingdom. The paramount chief, the Chitimukulu, remains the most important traditional authority among the Bemba today. The name 'Bemba' is believed to derive from the word for 'fish eagle' — a symbol of regal authority.

Cultural Note: The Chitimukulu – Paramount Chief of the Bemba

The Chitimukulu is not merely a political figure but a sacred one. He is believed to embody the spirits of previous chiefs and serves as an intermediary between the living and the ancestors (imipashi). His authority extends over a vast territory, and his court (at Mungwi, Northern Province) is the symbolic heart of Bemba identity. When speaking to or about the Chitimukulu, special honorific language is used — ordinary verbs are replaced with elevated forms, and one addresses him in the third person plural even in direct speech (royal register).

6.2 Matrilineal Kinship System

The Bemba practice a matrilineal kinship system — descent, inheritance, and clan identity pass through the mother's line.

Bemba Term	English	Cultural Significance
umama / mayo	mother (respectful)	Primary caregiver, matrilineal anchor
sengi	maternal uncle (mother's brother)	Most important male authority
mwipwa	nephew/niece (sister's child)	Primary heir in matrilineal system
shimapepo	grandmother (maternal)	Keeper of oral tradition
umufyala	parent-in-law	Requires formal respectful language
banankwe	co-wife (polygynous context)	Specific term for wife's co-wives
ichilomba	clan spirit/totem	Guides clan identity and taboos

6.3 Language & Social Register

Register Type	Features
Formal / Elder address	Full greetings, plural pronouns for elders, no contractions, use of titles
Peer speech	Shorter greetings, use of nicknames, more direct constructions
Royal register	Third-person plural for the chief, special honorific verbs
Children's speech	Simplified vocabulary, nursery forms, diminutive prefixes
Ritual/ceremonial speech	Archaic vocabulary, proverbs, poetic structures

Cultural Note: Greetings as Social Ritual

In Bemba culture, greetings are never mere formalities — they are social rituals that establish and reinforce relationships. To greet an elder properly, one must kneel or lower oneself slightly (ukuinama) and use the plural form of address ('muli shani?' even to a single elder, never 'uli shani?'). Skipping a proper greeting is considered deeply disrespectful. The greeting exchange can last several minutes as both parties enquire about health, family, the journey, and the crops.

Exercise 6A – Society & Social Structure

1. What does 'matrilineal' mean and how does it affect inheritance among the Bemba?

2. Who is the 'sengi' and why is he significant?
3. How should you greet a Bemba elder — what language features are expected?
4. What is the Chitimukulu, and what linguistic form is used when addressing him?
5. Why is skipping a proper greeting considered serious in Bemba culture?

Answer Key

1. Matrilineal means descent passes through the mother's line. Among the Bemba, property and titles are inherited by the sister's son, not the biological son.
2. The sengi is the mother's brother — the primary male authority in a child's life, responsible for guidance, discipline, and ceremonial roles.
3. Kneel or lower the body (ukuinama), use plural address ('muli shani?' not 'uli shani?'), give full greetings, use titles.
4. The Chitimukulu is the Bemba paramount chief, a sacred political and spiritual authority. He is addressed in the third-person plural (royal register).
5. Greetings establish and reinforce social bonds; skipping them signals disrespect, immaturity, or ignorance of cultural norms.

Module 7 — Ceremonies, Rituals & Spiritual Life

7.1 The Chisungu – Female Initiation

The Chisungu is the most important Bemba ceremony — a female initiation rite marking the transition from girlhood to womanhood. It is conducted by the nacimbusa (the female initiation specialist) and involves song, dance, pottery making, and the teaching of womanly wisdom. Audrey Richards' 1956 anthropological study 'Chisungu' remains a landmark work on this ceremony.

Bemba Term	English	Cultural Role
ichisungu	female initiation ceremony	Transition to womanhood
nacimbusa	female initiation specialist	Ceremonial teacher/leader
imbusa (pl: ambusa)	sacred clay emblems	Used in chisungu teaching
insansa	ceremonial song-cycle	Transmits initiation teachings
ubutomboli	initiation wisdom/knowledge	Transmitted during ceremony
ukulombola	to initiate / to teach ceremonially	Ceremonial instruction
imipashi	ancestral spirits	Consulted in all major ceremonies
ubwali bwa mulilo	sacred fire porridge	Ritual food in ceremonies

7.2 Ancestor Veneration & Imipashi

Ancestor spirits (imipashi, singular: icipashi) are central to Bemba spiritual life. The dead are not gone — they remain active participants in community life, offering protection when honoured and causing misfortune when neglected. Specialist priests (abashinshi) communicate with ancestral spirits on behalf of the community. Important life events (marriages, births, deaths, harvests) are accompanied by ritual communication with imipashi.

7.3 The Mutomboko Ceremony

The Mutomboko is the royal ceremony of the Lunda-Kazembe kingdom (closely related to Bemba culture) celebrated in Luapula Province. It commemorates the migration of the Lunda people and the victories of their chiefs. Language plays a central role: praise poetry (imishikakulo) is recited, historical narratives are told, and sacred royal names are invoked. The ceremony is a living archive of oral history.

Cultural Note: Death, Mourning & Language Taboos

Death rituals in Bemba culture involve specific language practices. The word for death ('ulufu') is often avoided in polite speech and replaced with euphemisms: 'wafwile' (he/she has died) becomes 'washalapo' (he/she has remained behind) or 'wafumya' (he/she has gone away). During mourning periods, certain topics and words are taboo. Widows and widowers undergo 'ukupyanika' (purification rituals) before returning to normal speech patterns and social interaction.

Exercise 7A – Ceremonies & Spiritual Life

1. What is the Chisungu and who leads it?
2. What are imipashi and what role do they play in Bemba spiritual life?
3. What are 'imbusa' and in what context are they used?
4. Why are euphemisms often used instead of the word 'ulufu' (death) in Bemba?
5. What is imishikakulo? In what ceremonial context is it used?

Answer Key

1. The Chisungu is the female initiation ceremony marking the transition from girlhood to womanhood. It is led by the nacimbusa.
2. Impashi are ancestral spirits of the dead, believed to remain active in community life — protecting when honoured, causing misfortune when neglected.
3. Imbusa are sacred clay emblems created during the Chisungu ceremony, used to teach initiates through symbolic meaning.
4. Death language is taboo in polite speech — euphemisms show respect for the deceased and protect speakers from symbolic association with death.
5. Imishikakulo is praise poetry. It is recited at royal ceremonies like the Mutomboko to honour chiefs and recount historical narratives.

Module 8 — Music, Storytelling & Performing Arts

8.1 Ifyabukopo – Bemba Folktales

Folktales (ifyabukopo, singular: icabukopo) are the primary vehicle of moral and social instruction in Bemba oral tradition. They are typically told at night around a fire (pa mulilo), and storytelling follows a call-and-response opening:

Traditional Storytelling Opening:

Storyteller: *Twafyalwa!* (We were born! / Let's begin!)

Audience: *Ee! Twafyalwa!* (Yes! We were born! / Let's go!)

Storyteller: *Pali cintu...* (There was a thing / Once upon a time...)

Cultural Note: Kalulu the Hare – Trickster Figure

Kalulu (the hare) is perhaps the most beloved character in Bemba oral tradition. His stories (ifyabukopo fya kalulu) teach children that cleverness, quick thinking, and social intelligence are more valuable than physical power. Kalulu regularly outwits lions, elephants, and crocodiles. These stories may be the African origin of Brer Rabbit stories carried to the Americas through the slave trade — a powerful example of how language and story travel with people.

8.2 Bemba Music – Genres & Language

Genre (Bemba)	Description & Language Features
Kalindula	Popular urban dance music from the Copperbelt; often sung in Bemba with social commentary lyrics
Insansa	Ceremonial song-cycles sung during initiation; uses archaic and symbolic language
Imilumbe	Praise songs; use highly elevated, poetic Bemba; reference to lineage and royal deeds
Uluchelo	Work songs sung during communal farming (ukutimba); set rhythm for collective labour
Icibusu	Lullabies; use gentle, simplified Bemba; often address the child directly by pet names
Amapipa	Drinking/social songs; playful, often satirical language; strong use of idioms

8.3 Praise Poetry – Imishikakulo

Praise poetry (imishikakulo) is a highly specialised art form performed by trained praise singers (abashikakulo). It uses a distinct register characterised by archaic vocabulary, extended metaphors drawn from royal history and natural imagery, rapid delivery with tonal percussion, lists of royal names and deeds, and call-and-response interaction.

Exercise 8A – Music, Story & Arts

1. What is the traditional opening call-and-response for Bemba storytelling?
2. Who is Kalulu and what does he represent in Bemba culture?
3. Name two Bemba musical genres and describe their language features.
4. What is imishikakulo and who performs it?
5. Why do work songs (uluchelo) matter linguistically?

Answer Key

1. Storyteller: 'Twafyalwa!' Audience: 'Ee! Twafyalwa!' — signalling readiness for the story.
2. Kalulu is the trickster hare — a folktale figure representing cleverness, wit, and social intelligence triumphing over brute strength.
3. Any two: e.g. Kalindula (popular, social commentary) and Insansa (ceremonial, archaic symbolic language).

4. Imishikakulo is praise poetry performed by trained abashikakulo (praise singers) at royal ceremonies, using archaic vocabulary, extended metaphors, and lineage recitation.

5. Work songs encode community knowledge, coordinate collective labour, and preserve vocabulary and rhythms in an embodied, participatory way.

Module 9 — Contemporary Zambia: Language in Modern Life

9.1 Bemba in Urban Zambia

Zambia's Copperbelt cities — Kitwe, Ndola, Luanshya, Mufulira — are the heartland of modern urban Bemba. The language has absorbed loanwords from English, Nyanja, and other Zambian languages, and a vibrant urban dialect has emerged. This dialect, sometimes called Town Bemba or Copperbelt Bemba, is more flexible and hybrid than the rural prestige dialect.

9.2 Loanwords & Language Contact

Bemba Form	Origin & Source Word	Domain
sukulu	school (< English 'school')	Education
motoka	car (< English 'motor car')	Transport
fon	phone (< English 'phone')	Technology
banki	bank (< English 'bank')	Finance
spitolo / cipatala	hospital (< English + indigenous)	Healthcare
kompyuta	computer	Technology
sitolo	store/shop	Commerce
tibile	table (< English 'table')	Furniture
soko	market (< Swahili 'soko')	Commerce
dokita	doctor	Healthcare

9.3 Code-Switching – Icibemba na English

Code-switching — mixing Bemba and English within a single conversation or even sentence — is extremely common in urban Zambia and is not considered a sign of poor language skills. It is a marker of educated urban identity.

Code-Switched Sentence	Analysis
Ndafwaya ukuya ku meeting.	I want to go to the meeting. (English noun inserted)
Wacheck email yobe?	Did you check your email? (English verb with Bemba subject prefix)
Uli busy lelo?	Are you busy today? (English adjective in Bemba frame)
Tukafika around five.	We will arrive around five. (English time phrase)

Cultural Note: The Copperbelt – Language Melting Pot

The Zambian Copperbelt was developed as a mining region during the colonial era, drawing workers from across the country and continent. This created an intensely multilingual environment where Bemba emerged as the dominant language of inter-ethnic communication. Copperbelt music (especially Kalindula and Zamrock) spread Bemba as a cultural language across Zambia and beyond.

9.4 Bemba in Media & Digital Spaces

Bemba is broadcast on ZNBC Radio 2 (Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation), which provides news, drama, and music in Bemba daily. Newspapers occasionally publish Bemba columns. Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp) has created new informal written Bemba — often phonetically spelled, heavily code-switched, with emoji integration. This digital Bemba is evolving rapidly and represents an exciting frontier for language study.

Exercise 9A – Contemporary Language

1. What is 'Town Bemba' and how does it differ from rural prestige Bemba?
2. Give three examples of English loanwords adapted into Bemba, noting sound changes.
3. What is code-switching? Is it considered a sign of language deficiency in Zambia?
4. Analyse this sentence: 'Ndafwaya ukuya ku meeting.' Identify Bemba and English elements.
5. Why did Bemba become dominant in the Copperbelt historically?

Answer Key

1. Town Bemba is the urban dialect of the Copperbelt — more hybrid, with more loanwords and code-switching, less conservative than the rural prestige dialect.
2. Any three: sukulu (school), motoka (motor car), foni (phone), dokita (doctor), etc. Note vowel insertion and adapted consonants.
3. Code-switching is mixing two languages in conversation. In urban Zambia it is a marker of educated identity, not a deficiency.
4. Bemba elements: Nda- (subject prefix, past), -fwaya (to want), ukuya (to go), ku (locative). English: 'meeting'.
5. Colonial mining drew workers from across Zambia; Bemba speakers were numerous and Bemba became the inter-ethnic lingua franca of the mines.

Module 10 — Advanced Writing, Debate & Composition

10.1 Formal Written Bemba

Formal written Bemba — used in government documents, religious texts, and formal letters — adheres closely to the standardised orthography established by missionaries in the 19th century (notably the London Missionary Society and White Fathers). It avoids loanwords where indigenous equivalents exist, uses full grammatical forms without elision, and employs a respectful, measured register.

10.2 Writing a Formal Letter in Bemba

Section	Bemba Convention
1. Intasyo (Opening address)	Mwenye wa [title/name] uyu mukwai — To the holder of [position]
2. Insalamu (Greeting)	Tuletumpa insalamu za luombwe — We send greetings with respect
3. Icifukwa ca kulemba (Purpose)	Twandika pali... / Twafwaya ukuebela... — We write regarding...
4. Umubilino (Body)	Full explanation using formal constructions
5. Ukupwa (Closing)	Tulebalikila... / Natotela — We remain... / Thank you
6. Shina (Signature)	Shina lyandi ni... — My name is...

10.3 Debate & Argumentation Phrases

Bemba Expression	English Function
Ndemona ukuti...	I think that... / I see that...
Icine ca fyonse...	The truth of the matter is...
Nokuba twalumba...	Even if we accept...
Kanti...	But / However...
Pachikulu...	Most importantly...
Pali yonse...	Above all...
Ifwe twasambilila...	We have learned that...
Kanshi twamonamo...	We can therefore see...
Mulandu wakulumba...	The argument stands that...
Ico twafwaya ukusosa...	What we want to say is...

10.4 Advanced Dialogue – A Community Meeting on Land Rights

Mwine Nkosi: Twafyalwa bonse pa mulilo uno. Icifukwa ca ukusangalala kwifwe ni umulandu wa mashamba.

(We have all gathered at this fire. The reason for our meeting is the matter of the fields.)

Nalukanda: Ee bwana. Ndemona ukuti abantu bakwata umulandu wa kushita mashamba yabo. Kanti, icine ca fyonse, ifyo bali ti: 'Umwine wa nkoko tekwata ifyuni'.

(Yes, sir. I think that people have the right to sell their fields. But, the truth of the matter is, as they say: 'The owner of a chicken does not catch wild birds.')

Chanda: Nawe ninshi bali ti ico? Ndemona ukuti tukafwaya ukulindila uluse na busuma.

(And what does that mean here? I think we will need patience and wisdom.)

Mwine Nkosi: Cawama. Kanshi tukabunganya amano yonse. Imwe muli no kutweba ifyo mwafwaya.

(Good. Let us therefore gather all our wisdom. You are able to tell us what you want.)

Nalukanda: Natotela, mwenye. Kanshi tukasosana bonse pantanshi ya no kusala.

(Thank you, sir. So let us discuss together before deciding.)

Exercise 10A – Advanced Composition

1. Write a 6–8 sentence paragraph in formal Bemba introducing yourself to a chief.
2. Translate this debate opener: 'The truth of the matter is that our language must be preserved.'
3. Identify the proverb used in Dialogue 5 and explain its relevance to the discussion.
4. What are the six components of a formal Bemba letter?
5. Write a short argument (4 sentences) in Bemba for or against building a new school in a village.

Answer Key

1. Open-ended — check for: formal opening address, respectful register, plural pronouns for the chief, correct verb forms.
2. 'Icine ca fyonse, ululimi lwesu lufwile ukusunga.'
3. 'Umwine wa nkoko tekwata ifyuni' — used to caution against abandoning what one already has (the land) in pursuit of short-term gain.
4. Intasyo (opening address), Insalamu (greeting), Icifukwa ca kulemba (purpose), Umubilino (body), Ukupwa (closing), Shina (signature).
5. Open-ended — check for: argument structure phrase (ndemona ukuti...), at least one supporting point, closing (kanshi...).

Appendix A — Advanced Grammar Reference

A.1 Complete Verb Extension Reference

Extension	Name	Core Meaning	Example
-il- / -el-	Applied	to/for/at	fundila (learn for)
-ish- / -esh-	Causative	cause to	fundisha (teach)
-iw- / -ew-	Passive	be done	fundywa (be taught)
-ik- / -ek-	Stative	able to be	fundika (be learnable)
-an-	Reciprocal	each other	fundana (learn each other)
-ul- / -ol-	Reversive	undo/reverse	shikula (open/undo)
-uk- / -ok-	Separative	away/out	tumbuka (jump away)
-ang-	Persistive	keep doing	fundanga (keep learning)
-ish-il-	Caus+Appl	cause for s.o.	fundishila (teach for)
-iw-il-	Pass+Appl	be done for	fundiwila (be taught for)

A.2 Noun Class Full Reference (Advanced)

Class	Noun Prefix	Example (sg/pl)	Verb Concord	Typical Content
1/2	umu-/aba-	umuntu/abantu	a-/ba-	People, humans
3/4	umu-/imi-	umutima/imitima	u-/i-	Body parts, natural objects
5/6	ici-/ifi-	icibuku/ifyabuku	ci-/fi-	General objects
7/8	ulu-/in-	ulupwa/impwa	lu-/n-	Abstract, collective
9/10	aka-/utu-	akana/utuana	ka-/tu-	Diminutive objects/people
11	ubu-	ubwali	bu-	Mass, abstract, substances
12	uku-	ukufunda	ku-	Infinitives, verbal nouns
Loc	ku-/pa-/mu-	ku nyumba	ku-/pa-/mu-	Locative (place)

Appendix B — Bemba Literature & Recommended Resources

B.1 Key Academic Works on Bemba

/Date	Title	Relevance
Richards (1956)	Chisungu: A Girls' Initiation Ceremony among the Bemba of Zambia	The foundational anthropological study of the Bemba female initiation
Ma Musambachime	History of the Bemba	Comprehensive historical account of the BaBemba kingdom and cl
d Hoch (1960)	Bemba-English Dictionary	The classic lexicographic reference; still widely used.
T.	Studies in Chibemba and Bantu Grammar	Advanced linguistic study of Bemba grammatical structures.
, Malcolm	The Classification of the Bantu Languages	Essential background on Bemba's place in the Bantu family.

B.2 Living Language Resources

Resource	Value for Advanced Learners
ZNBC Radio 2	Zambian national broadcaster with daily Bemba content (news, drama, music)
Bible in Bemba (Baibolo Lyacila Lyakutumpa)	Full Bible translation; excellent for formal written Bemba
Zambia Daily Mail	Occasional Bemba columns and news summaries
YouTube – Bemba Lessons	Various community channels with pronunciation and vocabulary lessons
Facebook Groups	Active Zambian diaspora groups where Bemba is used naturally online
Bemba Bible Society	Publishes materials in standard Bemba orthography

B.3 Your Advanced Learning Path

- Read Bemba Bible passages aloud to train formal register and pronunciation.
- Listen to ZNBC Radio 2 for one hour weekly — transcribe and translate a news segment.
- Learn 5 new proverbs per month, researching their cultural context.
- Find a Bemba conversation partner (Tandem app, Zambian diaspora groups).
- Study one new verb root weekly and derive all its extensions.
- Attend or watch recordings of Bemba ceremonies to absorb ceremonial language.
- Write a short composition (10–15 sentences) in Bemba weekly on a cultural topic.
- Read academic works listed in Appendix B to deepen cultural-linguistic understanding.

Ifyabupuba fya mwana tabwelela — The foolishness of youth does not return.